

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 SAIGON 15597 190555Z

13

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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R 190432Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1219

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

USDEL JEC PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 15597

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, VS

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH BISHOP THUAN ON PACM AND THE  
BUDDHISTS, NHA TRANG, DEC 12

FOLLOWING SENT ACTION AMEMBASSY SAIGON INFO AMCONSUL BIEN HOA,  
AMCONSUL CAN THO, AMCONSUL DANANG 18 DEC 74 REPEATED FOR  
YOUR INFO

QUOTE NHA TRANG 768

1. ON DECEMBER 12, THE CONSULATE GENERAL'S DEPUTY PRINCIPAL OFFICER  
AND POLITICAL/CONSULAR OFFICER CALLED ON BISHOP FRANCOIS XAVIER  
NGUYEN VAN THUAN. BISHOP THUAN IS THE NEPHEW OF FORMER PRESIDENT  
DIEM AND IS THE SPIRITUAL LEADER OF ALL CATHOLICS IN KHANH HOA,  
CAM RANH, NINH THUAN, BINH THUAN AND BINH TUY.

2. BISHOP THUAN BEGAN HIS COMMENTS ON PACM BY NOTING THAT FATHER  
THANH WAS A GOOD FRIEND OF HIS--BOTH CAME FROM HUE, AND THE BISHOP  
KNEW FATHER THANH'S FAMILY WELL. THE BISHOP HAD DISCUSSED PACM  
WITH FATHER THANH ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS. PERSONALLY, HOWEVER, BISHOP  
THUAN CHOSE NOT TO CHANNEL HIS ENERGIES THROUGH MILITANT ORGANIZA-  
TIONS LIKE PACM; RATHER HE PREFERRED TO WORK THROUGH WHAT HE  
CONSIDERED CONSTRUCTIVE ORGANIZATIONS, SUCH AS HIS OWN COVER (A  
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PAGE 02 SAIGON 15597 190555Z

CATHOLIC RELIEF AND RECONSTRUCTION ORGANIZATION ESTABLISHED AT

CEASEFIRE).

3. IN ESSENCE, BISHOP THUAN'S CRITICISM OF PACM WAS THAT IT TENDED TO GENERATE CHAOS, NOT PROGRESS. THIS CHAOS, THE BISHOP SUGGESTED, COULD EASILY BE EXPLOITED BY THOSE MORE POLITICALLY EXPERIENCED THAN THE PRIESTS. HE ADDED THAT WHILE PACM HAD GONE TO GREAT LENGTHS TO CRITICIZE PRESIDENT THIEU, THEY HAD OFFERED NO ONE WHO COULD REPLACE THIEU AS THE NATION'S LEADER. AND IN VIETNAM, LEADERSHIP CONSTITUTED THE MOST IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS. AS TO CORRUPTION, BISHOP THUAN CONCEDED THAT IT WAS AN ISSUE CLOSE TO THE COMMON MAN'S HEART. GIVEN CURRENT ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, THE PROBLEM OF CORRUPTION WORRIED THE COMMON MAN EVEN MORE THAN THE WAR ITSELF. YET, BISHOP THUAN CONTENTED, THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE WERE "NOT IN HEAVEN, BUT IN A WARTIME SITUATION." IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES, WHAT HUMAN BEING IS COMPLETELY UNCORRUPT?

4. BISHOP THUAN REITERATED THAT HE DID NOT AVOCATE A PASSIVE ROLE FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN VIETNAM'S CURRENT AFFAIRS. ON THE CONTRARY, HE THOUGHT THAT THE CHURCH--WORKING WITHIN VIETNAM'S CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK--REPRESENTED A POWERFUL FORCE FOR CHANGE. ALTHOUGH THERE WERE ONLY 1,700,000 CATHOLICS IN VIETNAM, THEY WERE WELL ORGANIZED. MOREOVER, CATHOLIC VALUES, WHICH STRESSED MAN'S ABILITY TO SHAPE HIS ENVIRONMENT, INCULCATED AN ACTIVIST ATTITUDE IN THE CATHOLIC PEOPLE. FINALLY, THROUGH SUCH VEHICLES AS THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM, CATHOLIC INFLUENCE SPILLED OVER INTO THE NON-CATHOLIC POPULATION.

5 BISHOP THUAN OFFERED FEW SPECIFICS AS TO THE MANNER IN WHICH THE CHURCH COULD MOST EFFECTIVELY ASSERT ITSELF. HE APPEARED TO FEEL THAT, ON THE POLITICAL FRONT, THE CHURCH SHOULD CONFINE ITSELF TO MORAL SUASION. WITH RESPECT TO SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, ON THE OTHER HAND, HE CLEARLY ENVISIONED A MORE DIRECT ROLE FOR THE CHURCH; COREV, OF WHICH HE IS THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, PRESUMABLY, WAS THE KIND OF ACTIVITY HE FELT THE CHURCH COULD MOST USEFULLY ENGAGE IN. IN ANY EVENT, THE BISHOP INSISTED THAT CATHOLIC EFFORTS OUGHT ALWAYS TO BE CONSTRUCTIVE AND LEGAL.

6. THE BISHOP WAS EMPHATIC IN HIS BELIEF THAT THE BUDDHISTS  
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PAGE 03 SAIGON 15597 190555Z

WERE A MOST UNPROMISING ALLY FOR THE CHURCH IN ITS EFFORTS TO PROMOTE CHANGE. THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF THE TWO RELIGIONS, BISHOP THUAN POINTED OUT, CONTRASTED SHARPLY. CHRISTIANITY WAS AN ACTIVIST RELIGION IMPORTED DIRECTLY FROM THE WEST; BUDDHISM EMBODIED A MORE PASSIVE WORLD-VIEW WHICH ORIGINATED IN INDIA AND PASSED TO VIETNAM BY WAY OF CHINA. THIS, WHILE CHRISTIANITY ENCOURAGED ACTIVITY, BUDDHISM COUNSELLED PATIENCE. AND, WHILE CATHOLIC PARISHES WERE EFFECTIVELY KNIT TOGETHER THROUGH THE

CATHOLIC HIERARCHY, EACH BUDDHISTS PAGODA WAS A SEPARATE ENTITY IN ITSELF. BISHOP THUAN ARGUED, IN CONCLUSION, THAT IT WOULD BE A LONG TIME BEFORE THE BUDDHIST COULD BE AN EFFECTIVE POLITICAL PARTNER FOR THE CATHOLICS.

7. COMMENT: BISHOP THUAN'S UNENTHUSIASTIC ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PACM IS SIMILAR TO THE ATTITUDE TAKEN BY THE BULK OF THE CHURCH HIERARCHY WITH RESPECT TO THE PACM IN MR-2. THAT THE CHURCH TAKES SUCH AN ATTITUDE IS ITSELF A SUBSTANTIONAL OBSTACLE TO A LINKING UP OF THE BUDDHISTS WITH FATHER THANH'S MOVEMENT, SINCE THE BUDDHISTS CLAIM TO BE UNWILLING TO JOIN IN A MOVEMENT THAT IS NOT CLEARLY SPONSORED BY THE CHURCH HIERARCHY. SIGNED SPEAR UNQUOTE MARTIN

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